

Oliver-French-Shields Company
Seventh building from the east on the block
between Bond and Hudson streets
Plains
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2220

HABS
GA,
131-PLAIN,
11-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

OLIVER-FRENCH-SHIELDS COMPANY

HABS No. GA-2220

HABS
GA,
131-PLAIN,
11-

Location: Seventh building from the east on Main Street in the business block between Bond and Hudson streets Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: Zone 16, E 746200 N 3546900.

Present Owner: Hugh Alton Carter.

Present Occupant/Use: Hugh Carter's Antiques.

Significance: The buildings in this business block were erected between 1896-1916 as brick was used to gradually replace the original wood-frame structures. Situated southwest of the Plains Depot, this block was a business hub for the region before the Depression.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1896.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a chain of title to the land on which the building stands. Deeds are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

1896 Deed October 25, 1896, recorded December 16, 1896, Deed Book AA, page 429. M.L. Hudson and C.C. Hudson to Oliver, French and Shields "the fifth store lot, together with a one-story frame store house," for \$550.

1931 Deed September 29, 1931, Deed Book 13, page 240. Oliver McDonald Company to Ross Dean a 60' x 100' lot containing two, two-story buildings.

1941 Deed March 22, 1941, recorded March 22, 1941, Deed Book 26, page 96. Ross Dean Estate to Plains Mercantile for \$650.

1971 Deed March 15, 1971, recorded March 14, 1972, Deed Book 120, page 166. Plains Mercantile to H.A. Carter.
3. Original plans and construction: None have been located.
4. Alterations and additions: A brick enclosure to house a bank vault was added to the southeast corner of the store in the 1920s. The vault was

removed, but the brick enclosure remains.

- B. Historical Context: This was the first brick building constructed in this business block. Built by Oliver, French, and Shields as a general merchandise store, Shields was dropped from partnership before the turn of the century. The Oliver-French Company expanded during its first decade with the 1902 addition of an east annex (see HABS No. GA-2219). Soon after its erection, French left the firm to join forces with Lunsford and Timmerman, who built another store down the street (see HABS No. GA-2217). After John McDonald joined Oliver, the firm was renamed the Oliver-McDonald Company.

A pamphlet issued by the industrial department of the Seaboard Air Line Railway in the 1910s called the company "the largest retail business in this section," selling fertilizer and cotton-seed products, handling about 5,000 bales of cotton per season, and employing ten persons.

A 1910 directory listed the firm as a dealer in general merchandise and furniture, and also as undertakers.² The connection between cabinet making and undertaking was common at the time, and eventually, Ross Dean, who operated a funeral home from 1912-17 out of a building down the street (see HABS No. GA-2215) was brought into the partnership, becoming the secretary/treasurer. His funeral parlor moved in 1918 to the annex erected west of this building in 1912 (see HABS No. GA-2221).

R.S. Oliver died in 1928, and Dean purchased the store from the heirs, as well as the adjacent building where he operated his mortuary. William Alton Carter (1888-1978) began renting this space from Dean in the late 1920s to operate the Plains Mercantile Company. Carter's career in merchandising began in 1905 when he was 17 years old and worked for the Oliver-McDonald Company; by 1909 he had his own firm, the Plains Mercantile Company, which he operated from another building in the commercial block (see HABS No. GA-2217). A shrewd businessman and prominent civic leader, Carter served as mayor of Plains in the 1920s. As business flourished, he invested in real estate, purchasing the Plains Bank building in 1928, this building in 1941, and the adjacent building to the west in 1944. City records list mules, groceries, cigarettes, gasoline, drugs and millinery among the items sold at the store.³ After the Plains Bank failed in the 1920s, Carter opened a bank in the rear of this store and installed a large safe. Plains citizens recall that women would come from surrounding towns to purchase ready-made dresses and hats in the clothing department on the second floor which was managed by Mary Lou McTyier Burnette.⁴ Jimmy Carter remembers when his father purchased his first

¹ Industrial Dept., S.A.L. Ry., Pamphlet, 1910s, p. 33.

² Young and Co.'s Business and Professional Directory, 1901-10, p. 499.

³ Business license ledger, Plains City Hall.

⁴ Beth Walters, History of Plains, Georgia 1885-1985, 1985, p. 57.

tailor-made suit at the store, only to discover upon returning home that a mistake had been made by the tailor because the suit was twice as large as it was supposed to be.⁵

Plains Mercantile thrived for more than six decades before W.A. Carter sold it in 1971 to his son, Hugh. Hugh Carter, a former state senator and fish-bait farmer (see HABS Nos. GA-2218 and GA-2221), sells antiques and souvenirs in what he calls the most famous antique store in the nation, because of its patronage and media coverage during the 1975 Carter presidential campaign.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The oldest brick building in this commercial block, this is a two-story vernacular structure with a recessed first-floor storefront. Narrow and deep, it features modest turn-of-the-century detailing.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This 30'-0" x 100'-0", two-story rectangular structure has a four-bay facade.
2. Foundations: Brick.
3. Walls: Brick walls of seven-course American bond on the north and south facades. The north/front facade has brick corner pilasters; the first floor of the storefront is canted and largely glazed with wood panel kickplates. A corbelled stringcourse divides the first and second floors; above the second-floor windows is a wide stringcourse with a repeated triangular motif. The east and west walls are shared with adjacent buildings.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick. Three chamfered beams down the center axis support the first-floor ceiling.
5. Porches: A shed roof of corrugated metal runs the length of the front facade and those of the flanking buildings. It is supported on rectangular wood posts set in battered concrete pedestals.

⁵ Jimmy Carter, Why Not the Best?, 1975, p. 15.

6. Chimneys: Several small brick flues along the parapets served wood- or coal-burning stoves.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: double wood doors, largely glazed, are centered in the north/front facade. Double four-panel wood doors are centered in the south/rear facade.
 - b. Windows: The first-floor storefront on the north facade contains four large fixed display windows; the two flanking the door are canted. Three two-over-two-light double-hung wood sash access each display area. Above the door and windows is a band of continuous fixed glazing. The second floor of the front facade features three two-over-two-light double-hung wood sash with brick arches composed of two rows of rowlocks and brick lug sills. A stringcourse connects all four openings. Three rear/south facade windows with sills and arches identical to those on the front have been boarded up.
8. Roof: The flat rectangular roof slants slightly downward and has parapets and a brick cornice on the north/front facade.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: The large rectangular space is open with a partitioned counter and office in the rear. A brick room, which once housed a safe, remains in the southeast corner. A metal ladder access the roof of the safe.
 - b. Second floor: Unpartitioned rectangular space.
2. Stairways: Eight wood risers lead to a landing in the middle of the east wall. Twenty risers continue north along the wall to the second floor. The stairway has a wood banister.
3. Flooring: Wood tongue-and-groove boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Approximately 1" thick plaster covers the brick walls. Ceilings are tongue-and-groove panels.
5. Doorways and doors: Two arched openings on the east wall of the first and second floors connect the two stores. A two-panel, one-light wood door leads to the office.

6. Decorative features and trim: Built-in shelves line the west wall.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Historically the space was heated by wood- or coal-burning stoves. Space heaters are now used.
 - b. Lighting: Electric fluorescent ceiling fixtures.
 - c. Kerosene pump: Kerosene from a tank behind the building could be drawn by a pump in the rear of the store
- D. Site: This is the seventh commercial building from the east in a row of eight facing north onto Main Street.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: None have been located.
- B. Early Views: Photograph in a brochure issued by the Industrial Department of the Seaboard Air Line Railway in the 1910s shows that the structures have had little exterior alteration.
- C. Interviews:

Hugh Alton Carter, current owner, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, June 1989, Plains, Georgia.
- D. Bibliography:
 1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deeds are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

City of Plains business permit ledger, 1963, Plains City Hall, Plains, Georgia.
 2. Secondary and published sources:

Carter, Jimmy, Why Not the Best?, Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1975.

Industrial Department, Seaboard Air Line Railway, pamphlet, issued in the 1910s, p. 33.

Walters, Beth, History of Plains, Georgia, 1885-1985, Americus, GA:
Gammage Print Shop, 1985.

Young's Business and Professional Directory 1909-10, p. 199.

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